

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

What Is Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah & How Does It Differ From Tawḥīd ar-Rubūbiyyah?

Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah

توحيد الألوهية — also known as Tawḥīd al-‘Ibādah (Tawḥīd of Worship) refers to the exclusive devotion and direction of all acts of worship inwardly and outwardly to Allāh alone, with



love, humility, submission, fear, hope, and dependence — without associating any partner with Him in any form of worship.

It is called ‘Ulūhiyyah because it is based on recognizing Allāh as the only true Ilāh (God), meaning the only one who is worshipped in truth, and the only one who deserves to be worshipped, due to His perfection, His Rubūbiyyah (Lordship), and His Names and Attributes.

Imām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah is the Tawḥīd of Allāh in acts of the servant — such as du‘ā’, khawf (fear), rajā’ (hope), tawakkul (reliance), isti‘ānah (seeking help), isti‘ādhah (seeking refuge), dhabh (sacrificing), nadhr (vows), and all other types of worship. It is that he worships none but Allāh alone.”¹

Imām Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله explained: “Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah is the Tawḥīd of Allāh through the actions of the servants — such as prayer,

¹ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā 1/95

fasting, pilgrimage, speaking the truth, fulfilling trusts, enjoining good, and forbidding evil — all of which are done sincerely for Allāh.”²

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān حفظه الله clarified: “Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah is to worship Allāh alone, not associating anything with Him. It is this Tawḥīd that the Messengers were sent with, and it is the area where many have gone astray. It is not enough to affirm Rubūbiyyah without ‘Ulūhiyyah.”³

This type of Tawḥīd is the essence of the dā‘wah (call) of all the Prophets, and the foundation of Islām. It is the very purpose for which jinn and mankind were created.

Allāh says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”⁴

Definition of Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah

Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah (توحيد الربوبية) is the belief that Allāh alone is the Creator, Sustainer, Provider, and Controller of all affairs. It affirms that Allāh alone manages the universe.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān حفظه الله said: “It is to single out Allāh with His actions: creation, provision, giving life and death, control of all matters. This is something even the mushrikūn (idolaters) affirmed.”⁵

Affirmation of Rubūbiyyah by idolaters

وَلَيْنِ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ

“If you were to ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and the earth?’ They would surely say, ‘Allāh.’”⁶

² Madarij al-Sālikīn, 3/448

³ Ithāf al-Qārī, 1/17

⁴ Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt 51:56

⁵ Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah

⁶ Sūrah Luqmān 31:25

But they denied ‘Ulūhiyyah:

وَجَعَلُوا لِلَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ لِيُضِلُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

“They set up partners with Allāh to mislead from His path”⁷

Thus, affirming Rubūbiyyah alone does not make one a Muslim — ‘Ulūhiyyah is the true test.

The Crucial Difference:

Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah relates to Allāh’s actions (creating, sustaining, providing).

Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah relates to our actions toward Allāh (worship, du‘ā’, fear, love).

Ibn Abī al-‘Izz al-Ḥanafī رحمه الله explained: “The disbelievers affirmed Rubūbiyyah but did not enter Islam due to their rejection of ‘Ulūhiyyah. The issue between the Messengers and their people was regarding worship.”⁸

- Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah requires negation and affirmation, as in Lā ilāha illa Allāh — None has the right to be worshipped (negation) except Allāh (affirmation).
- Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah rejects every form of shirk, whether major or minor — from invoking the dead, relying on saints, seeking barakah (blessings) from graves, to showing off in worship.
- Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah It is the practical implementation of Tawḥīd, while Rubūbiyyah is belief-based. Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah requires action.

⁷ Sūrah al-An‘ām 6:137

⁸ Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwiyyah

Example from the Salaf

Imām Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله said: “The Qur'an is all about Tawḥīd: either Tawḥīd of Rubūbiyyah, or ‘Ulūhiyyah, or His Names and Attributes, or His Commands. The call of the Messengers was centered upon ‘Ulūhiyyah.”⁹

Shaykh Ibn Bāz رحمه الله said: “The mushrikūn did not deny Rubūbiyyah. They accepted that Allāh was the Creator. But they worshipped other than Him, like idols, pious people, or trees — and this is why they were disbelievers.”¹⁰

Tawḥīd al-Rubūbiyyah is affirmed by many — even idolaters. But Tawḥīd al-‘Ulūhiyyah is what truly separates the Muslim from the disbeliever. It is the essence of the shahādah: “Lā ilāha illa Allāh” — None has the right to be worshipped except Allāh. "Worship Allāh and associate nothing with Him."¹¹

And this is the call of the Prophet ﷺ and all the Messengers: "Indeed, We sent to every nation a messenger [saying], ‘Worship Allāh and avoid ṭāghūt.’”¹²

⁹ Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa‘ādah 2/89

¹⁰ Fatāwā Nūr ‘ala ad-Darb

¹¹ Sūrah an-Nisā’ 4:36

¹² Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:36

